

Xanthoceras sorbifolium - Growing Guide

Growing Xanthoceras Sorbifolium

This is one of those rare large shrubs or small trees that, once seen in flower, is an absolute 'must have' for serious woodland gardeners and especially those who wish to extend the spring flowering season into May or early June.

Xanthoceras sorbifolium is a plant from northern China introduced by Père David in 1866 which grows in scrub and woodland margins. It is a genus of only one species and its generic name comes from the Greek words for yellow and horn referring to the horn-like appendages to its individual flowers.

It grows quite slowly with us at Caerhays and is slow to get going when planted out. We have however occasionally exhibited it on our stands at Chelsea where it has attracted quite a bit of excitement and interest.

The leaves are dark green, pinnate and 5-8in long with between nine and seventeen individual leaflets on each leaf stalk. Upright terminal panicles of white flowers emerge in late May in tunnels in the nursery or early June in the garden. The base of each flower has, initially, a yellow-green blotch but this turns to light brown as the flowers mature.

X. sorbifolium is perfectly hardy but is a heat loving plant which thrives best in hotter and dry conditions where there is no risk to the flowers of a late frost. Some of the best specimens growing in the UK are in the home counties and particularly Kent and Sussex.

Propagation is easiest from root cuttings or rooted suckers. X. sorbifolium wants to spread by suckering like many small trees growing on the forest edge. Seed should be sown in containers in early spring but we have not yet seen any ripe seed on our own plants.



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Burncoose Nurseries: Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 1209 860316 Fax: +44 (0) 1209 860011 Email: info@burncoose.co.uk

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